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THE CIVILIZATION AND
CULTURE OF
NUZI AND THE HURRIANS

Volume 15

GENERAL STUDIES AND
EXCAVATIONS AT NUZI II/1

Edited by
DAVID L. OWEN
and
GERNOT WILHELM



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Urkesh and the North: Recent Discoveries

MARILYN KELLY-BUCCELLATI

Los Angeles

The identification of Tell Mozan with the ancient city of Urkesh in northern Syria has provided a unique opportunity to differentiate between Hurrian culture to the north, in eastern and central Anatolia (Early Transcaucasian culture), and in the south, in Mesopotamia. This article focuses particularly on recent discoveries at Tell Mozan that provide new evidence for connections with the highlands to the north and suggest that the Hurrians also occupied that region, albeit in a more rural environment. Utilizing newly excavated glyptic data, andirons, and Early Transcaucasian pottery found at Tell Mozan, the article highlights these connections and their implications for the role of Urkesh as a meeting point for cultural traditions both northern and southern.

Since 1995 we have known that the site of Tell Mozan is the ancient city of Urkesh. Urkesh is the only third-millennium city that can be identified with the Hurrians thus far. Both its identification and the discovery of its connections with a Hurrian dynasty stem from the finding, in our excavations, of a large number of seal impressions and, in particular, of some 300 inscribed examples that are attributed to a Hurrian ruler of Urkesh, Tupkish, his consort with an Akkadian name, Uqritum, another woman with an Akkadian name, Tar'am-Agade (daughter of Naram-Sin and presumably the wife of a later king of Urkesh), and members of their court. Thus far eight kings of Urkesh have been recognized—both from our seal impressions and from other epigraphic sources.¹

¹ G. Buccellati and M. Kelly-Buccellati, "Tar'am-Agade, Daughter of Naram-Sin, at Urkesh," in *Of Pots and Plans. Papers on the Archaeology and History of Mesopotamia and Syria Presented to David Oates in Honour of His 75th Birthday*, edited by L. Al-Gailani Werr, J. Curtis, H. Martin, A. McMahon, J. Oates, and J. Reade (London: Nabu Publications, 2002) 11–31, includes references to previous publications. Not discussed here but important for the Hurrian cultural expression at Urkesh is the monumental *ābi* prominent in Hurrian/Hittite texts as a type of Hurrian necromantic pit for calling forth the deities of the Netherworld, see M. Kelly-Buccellati, "Ein hurritischer Gang in die Unterwelt," *Mitteilungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft* 134 (2003) 131–48.

Given the city's clear connection with the Hurrians² and its noteworthy cultural associations with the north,³ Urkesh is a major point of reference that can form the basis for the possible interpretation of other prominent aspects of northern material culture, especially as seen in parts of eastern and central Anatolia. Through Urkesh we have the potential to connect this northern evidence with the Hurrians, even though there is not a corresponding northern textual tradition in the third millennium. In this article I am presenting new material from our recent excavations that is distinctly northern, i.e., different from the better-known cultural expressions in southern Mesopotamia. Since, on the one hand, Urkesh can otherwise be shown to be a Hurrian city and since, on the other, the cultural indicators that define some aspects of Urkesh material culture are found also in the highlands to the north, we can legitimately propose that the people of the highlands are also Hurrian, although, for the most part, rural Hurrians as opposed to the urban Hurrians of Urkesh.

1. SEAL ICONOGRAPHY,

A DISTINCTLY HURRIAN ELEMENT IN THE CULTURE OF URKESH

Both the seal inscriptions and iconography of Tupkish and Uqnitum, including the servants closely connected with Uqnitum,⁴ display a distinctive style that is characteristic of this dynasty. The seal inscriptions name Tupkish as *endan* and depict him in what has been interpreted as a stately scene within his throne room with a lion reclining at his feet.⁵ The seal inscriptions connected with Uqnitum characterize her position in the court as both DAM and NIN.⁶ Her iconography depicts her surrounded by the women of her court in a setting characterized by a large table that is also seen in later seals. Both these rulers,

² See article by G. Buccellati in this volume.

³ Some of these have been discussed in M. Kelly-Buccellati 1996, "Nuzi Viewed from Urkesh, Urkesh Viewed from Nuzi: Stock Elements and Framing Devices in Northern Syro-Mesopotamia," *Studies on the Civilization and Culture of Nuzi and the Hurrians* 8 (1996) 247–68 and "Andirons at Urkesh. New Evidence for the Hurrian Identity of the Early Transcaucasian Culture," in Anthony Sagona, ed., *A View from the Highlands: Studies in Honour of Charles Burney* (Ancient Near Eastern Studies Supplement 12; Peeters Louvain 2003) 67–89. See also Jeanny Vorys Canby, "A Figurine from Urkesh: A 'Darling' from Troy to Mesopotamia," *Iraq* 65 (2003) 171–73.

⁴ G. Buccellati and M. Kelly-Buccellati, "The Courtiers of the Queen of Urkesh: Glyptic Evidence from the Western Wing of the Royal Storehouse AK," *Subartu* 4/2 (1998) 195–216.

⁵ G. Buccellati and M. Kelly-Buccellati, "The Royal Storehouse of Urkesh: The Glyptic Evidence from the Southwestern Wing." *Archiv für Orientforschung* 42–3, (1995–96) 1–32. While there is evidence for sculptured decoration in the form of lions as part of throne bases, it has been argued in connection with the Tupkish throne scene that he has a living lion at his feet based on the rendering of this lion as having his body and tail intertwined with the throne and on the fact that the crown prince paying homage to Tupkish is shown standing on the head of the lion with his feet sinking into the lion's mane.

⁶ *Ibid.* The seal inscriptions use the logograms NIN for "queen" and DAM Tupkish "wife of Tupkish" or simply DAM "the (primary) wife of the king."

then, are shown in scenes that might be connected with the formal rooms of the palace in settings reflecting their power as dynasts and their royal concerns for dynastic succession. This last is communicated through scenes presenting royal children paying homage to both Tupkish and Uqnitum. From the seal inscriptions we know that not only does the king Tupkish have a Hurrian personal name, but the two courtiers closely connected through their seal inscriptions with Uqnitum have Hurrian names as well: Zamena, the nurse, and Tuli, the royal cook.⁷ The iconography on the seals of both reflects either royal concerns, in the case of the seals of Zamena showing a royal child or important court activities, in the case of Tuli the stress is on the preparation of the royal banquet. In the seal iconography of both Tuli and Zamena their court function (cook and nurse respectively) are also stressed through their iconography.

During the 2003 excavation season an impression of a new seal of Zamena was discovered in the palace (Figs. 1 and 2). The inscription attributes the seal to Zamena; the scene is very similar to seals that we have already excavated of the nurse.⁸ It contains a scene with Uqnitum seated facing right holding her child; one of her attendants stands behind her. The new element concerns the activity of this attendant. In the previously excavated seals of Zamena (Fig. 3) Uqnitum is shown wearing her hair in a long braid with a distinctive braid ornament hanging near the end. Her daughter too, when shown on her seals, is distinguished by this same braid and braid decoration. Whereas in previously excavated seals of Zamena the braid is already completed and the servant standing behind the queen is holding a long narrow device. In this new impression this element is evidently a comb. This is clear because the servant holding the comb is in the process of braiding the queen's hair! Three strands of hair have already been separated for the braid.

Although we have known for some time that the seal iconography of Urkesh is unique and that scenes connected with Uqnitum show her in familiar, everyday scenes in a court setting, nothing discovered thus far pointed to a context of such intimacy. We are, of course, familiar with the fact that more modern courts stressed access to such intimate royal moments as a symbol of royal power, as well as special relationships. Within the context of the court at Urkesh, it appears likely that this scene may be interpreted in a similar fashion. Our discovery stresses the fact, in a clearer manner than we had seen previously, that the hair style of Uqnitum was one of the symbols of her status and power. This hair style is worn only by the queen and her daughter in the seal impressions we have excavated thus far in Mozan. For Zamena to depict the moment when Uqnitum had her hair braided is a visual proclamation of her

⁷ G. Buccellati and M. Kelly-Buccellati, "Überlegungen zur funktionellen und historischen Bestimmung des Königspalastes AP in Urkesh," *MDOG* 133 (Berlin 2001) 59–96, especially pp. 76–77.

⁸ G. Buccellati and M. Kelly-Buccellati, 1995–96; M. Kelly-Buccellati, "The Workshops of Urkesh," in *Urkesh and the Hurrians: Studies in Honor of Lloyd Cotsen*, edited by G. Buccellati and M. Kelly-Buccellati (Malibu: Undena Publications, 1998) 35–50.



FIG. 1

New seal impression of the royal nurse Zamena.

(Photo G. Gallacci)



FIG. 2

New Zamena seal impression.

(Drawing F. L. Portales)

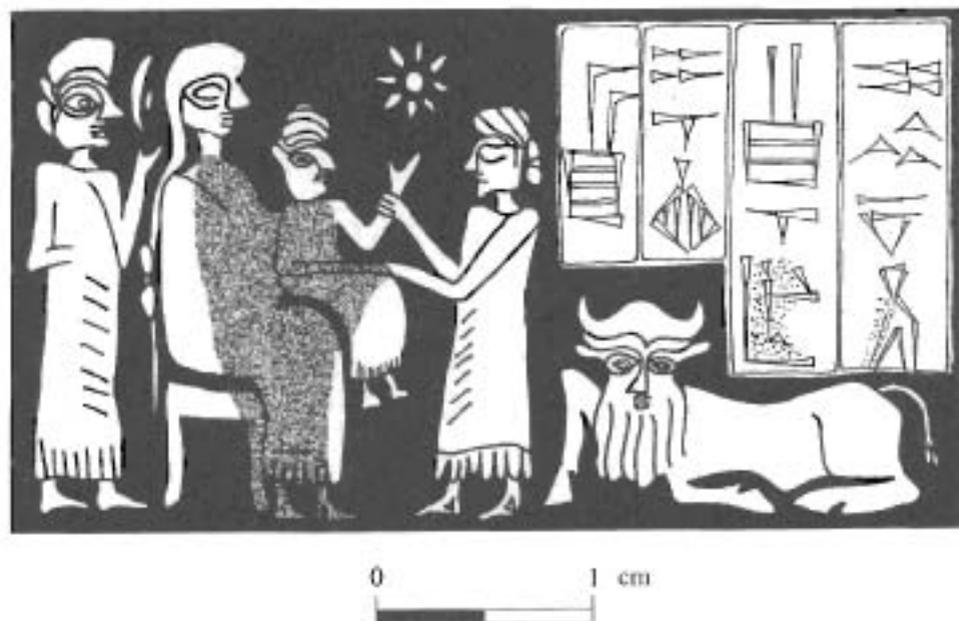


FIG. 3
Previously known seal of Zamena.
(Drawing C. Hilsdale)

uniquely intimate relationship with the queen.⁹ Within the realm of the women at the court of Urkesh, the Hurrian nurse Zamena is one of the most important as shown by the number of excavated seal impressions belonging to her. She was most likely a woman not only of a certain economic power but also a figure of some considerable influence within the queen's court because of this exceptional relationship.

In all the Urkesh inscribed seal impressions from the period of Tupkish and Uqnitum the concern of the Hurrian court and the art that was produced for it had its roots in a preoccupation with the values of political stability and the perpetuation of a constant hierarchical order as seen by them embodied in the dynasty. That this should have been a worry is shown by what happened later when the king of Mari, Zimri-Lim, did in fact install his own rulers over the city of Urkesh, causing considerable friction in the city.¹⁰

⁹ It should be noted that Zamena is called the nurse "of" Uqnitum, which obviously does not necessarily mean that she had nursed an infant Uqnitum, but that she was in charge of Uqnitum's offspring. From the Ebla texts we know that wetnurses were important in the court as shown by Biga, see M. G. Biga, "Femmes de la Famille Royale d'Ebla," in J.-M. Durand, *La femme dans le Proche-Orient antique* (RAI 33; Paris 1987) 41-47.

¹⁰ J.-R. Kupper, *Lettres royales du temps de Zimri-Lim* (Paris: Archives royales de Mari XXVIII, 1998) 55-62.

2. CULTURAL INDICATORS THAT ARE POTENTIALLY HURRIAN

While we can safely attribute the previously discussed seal iconography found at Urkesh to a Hurrian dynasty, others are not as certainly connected to the Hurrians but appear plausibly to stem from their traditions. This is especially true in the case of elements of material culture connected with major population components of eastern Anatolia in the third millennium. The culture of eastern Anatolia and the Armenian highlands for most of the third millennium, called the Early Transcaucasian culture by most scholars today, can be viewed only through its archaeological history since, even though it was on the northern fringes of literate Syro-Mesopotamia, no writing has been found in relation to this culture. Despite this, the material culture has been well defined through a long history of excavations in the region. The dominant characteristics of its archaeological inventory are shown through the lustrous black and red pottery it produced and by the decorated andirons found both in private houses and buildings possibly used only for ritual activities. Since these last are architecturally the same as houses, a question still remains as to their exact function. It is especially through the Early Transcaucasian type of burnished ceramics and decorated andirons that connections can be made with Urkesh.

2.1. *Andirons at Urkesh*

Andirons in the Early Transcaucasian culture are horseshoe shaped with incised and applied decoration, usually anthropomorphic but also with geometric elements, on the two end portions of the andiron. Recently at Tell Mozan we have been excavating in an area of private houses dating to the Khabur period, a time when the city was ruled by authorities appointed by Zimri-Lim. These houses contain permanently placed andirons that have a decoration very similar to the Early Transcaucasian examples.¹¹ Additionally, small portable andirons with the same type of decoration have been found. The letters from Zimri-Lim to the rulers he had installed in Urkesh, i.e., Terru and Haziran, show clearly that the local people in Urkesh did not accept the overlordship of these foreign Amorite rulers.¹² The situation appears to be one of the local Hurrian urban population reaffirming their ethnic identity and their connections to the rural population in the mountains to the north and east through the use of artifacts traditionally associated with these regions.

2.2. *Early Transcaucasian Pottery at Urkesh*

One of the numerous reasons that we decided to excavate the site of Tell Mozan was the likelihood of its cultural relations with Anatolia in the third millennium. In our sixteen campaigns of excavation only a small amount of Early Transcaucasian pottery has been discovered. However, the existence of this pottery both in the main temple BA in strata dating to the mid-third

¹¹ M. Kelly-Buccellati, 2003.

¹² Kupper 1998.

millennium and the later third-millennium palace of Tupkish signals a continuity of contact even if the evidence is scarce.

This pottery as found in our temple BA is characterized by bowl shapes, with burnished interior and exterior surfaces, red-brown or blackish-gray in color. Some of the finer examples have lustrous black interior and exterior surfaces. The clay has been tempered by adding straw and contains some mineral inclusions. Firing is medium to high but often a firing cloud can be seen.¹³ None of our examples is decorated. The earlier examples from the temple (Fig. 4) are more finely burnished than the later examples from the palace (Fig. 5). The shapes of the later examples, too, are either body sherds, apparently from bowls, or rim sherds of medium bowls.

Whether the Early Transcaucasian culture is one produced by a Hurrian population has been a question of intense debate. This evidence from the Hurrian city of Urkesh sheds new light on the complex cultural interactions between the urban Hurrian population of Urkesh and the rural population to its north.¹⁴

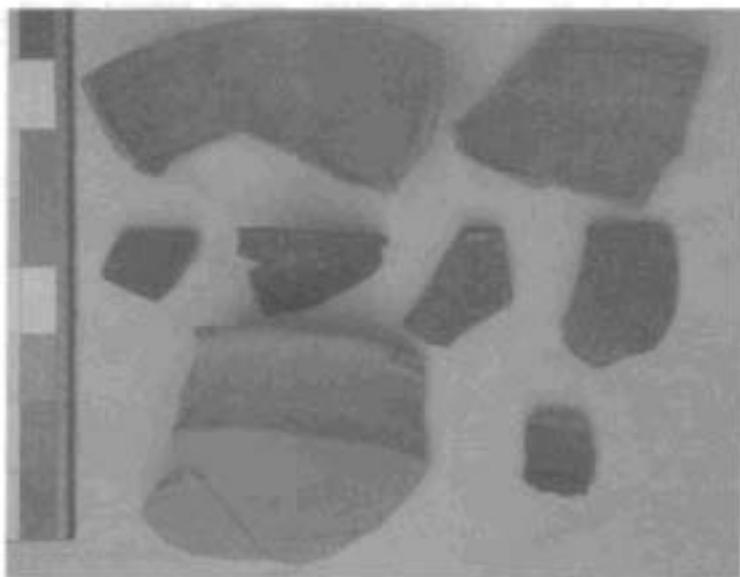


FIG. 4

Early Transcaucasian sherds from the temple BA.

(Photo J. Forde)

¹³ The Urkesh pottery from the palace and strata above the palace, including some Early Transcaucasian sherds, has been studied from a technical point of view by Yoko Taniguchi.

¹⁴ The metals trade was an important source of contact between the two, see M. Kelly-Buccellati, "Trade Metals in the Third Millennium: Northeastern Syria and Eastern Anatolia," in *Resurrecting the Past: A Joint Tribute to Adnan Bouwni*, ed by P. Matthiae, M. Van Loon, and H. Weiss (Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut, 1990) 117-30.

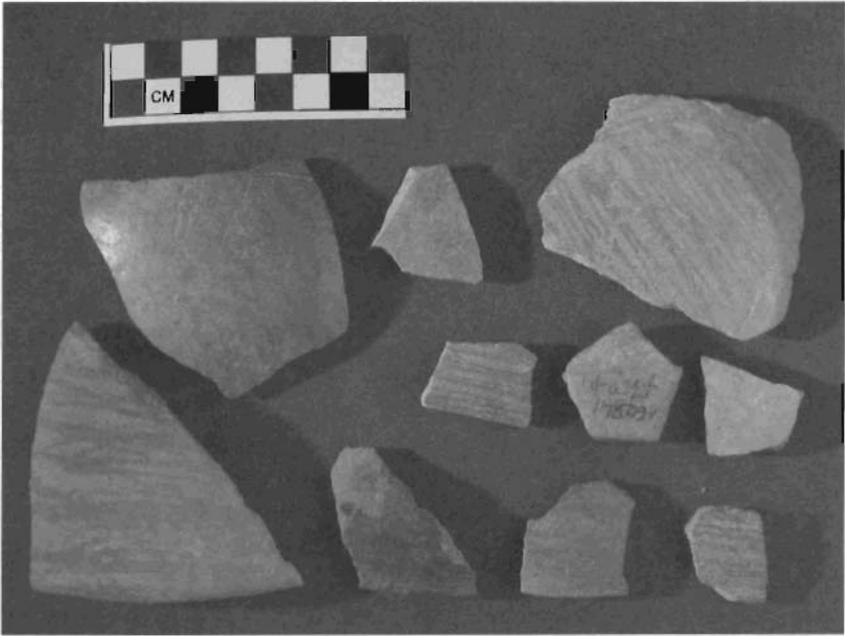


FIG. 5

Early Transcaucasian sherds from the palace AS.

(Photo G. Gallacci)

3. A UNIQUE CYLINDER SEAL

During the 2003 excavation season we discovered in a deposit immediately above the floor accumulation of the palace¹⁵ a cylinder seal with a unique iconography of a ritual scene depicted as it was taking place, a snapshot as it were of the ritual (Figs 6 and 7). The iconography is very distinctive and may give evidence of a Hurrian religious setting.

On the seal, a seated figure, probably a female, wears a vertically pleated garment with her left shoulder bare and holds, with her left hand, a tapering object with a curved top inside a cylindrical vessel that narrows toward the base. Before her stand two priests dressed identically in a fringed kilt and wearing a hat characterized by an extension over the ears and under the chin. One priest holds a ritually slain bull by both rear legs; his truncated neck is clearly displayed between the two figures. The reversed body position can be explained as allowing for the quick evacuation of the blood. It may be that the blood is contained in the vessel in front of the seated woman or in the necked jar at the top of the palm column. The second priest holds the tail of the bull in

¹⁵ In other words, from a stratigraphic point of view, the seal belongs to an accumulation of phase 3 (which we have called the Palace Dependency period, dating to Tar'am-Agade), but may well have survived from phase 2 (i.e., the Tupkish palace).



FIG. 6
Seal with ritual scene.
(Photo J. Jarnakani)

one hand and a sacrificial knife in the other. Dramatically, the severed head of the bull is placed at the base of a palm column supporting at the top a large necked jar. In front of the seated figure there may have been a disc inside a crescent moon; unfortunately the seal is chipped in this area. A large star is placed between the seated figure and the priest holding the knife and the tail of the bull.

The carving style of the seal renders the volumes of the figures but shows none of the musculature seen in the Akkadian contest scenes of the period of Naram-Sin. Emphasis is given to the precise outlines of fully modeled figures and linear details of all the figures in a composition that exhibits their even distribution across the surface of the design. The preservation indicates that the seal had very seldom been used, as only a few areas are chipped or abraded (as inside the crescent or under the feet of both the seated figure and one priest and at the base of the cylindrical container).

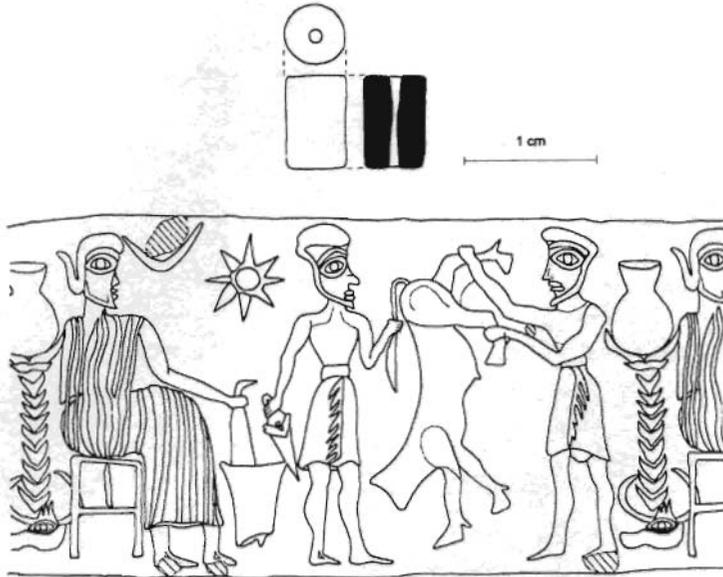


FIG. 7
Ritual scene (A15.270)
(Drawing F. L. Portales)

While the seals of both Tupkish and Uqnitum are predominantly secular in theme and the scene on this new seal is religious, the style closely resembles theirs in many ways.¹⁶ One fundamental point is that of innovation; all these Urkesh seals have as their starting point unique scenes that have a very focused theme. In the case of Tupkish and Uqnitum the theme is one of the display of royal power and prestige combined with motifs connected with royal succession. In this new seal the theme lies in the cultic realm, that is one showing the moment of the enactment of a religious ritual. Although there are bull slaying scenes in Akkadian glyptic, none has the clear connection to a detailed ritual activity that this new Urkesh seal exhibits. Another point in common is the emphasis on showing the figures working. In this seal all the figures are "working," that is, actively participating in the activities connected with the ritual. In this regard the fact that the seated figure has only one arm shown, the active arm, may not be an accident. This figure is obviously participating in the action. In Akkadian seals the deity or his representative is often depicted seated, but even when the divinity is standing, as for instance Shamash rising, the pose is static and emblematic. In this new Urkesh seal the seated figure is actively participating in a ritual activity that involves a number of figures all conjoined

¹⁶ M. Kelly-Buccellati 1998, "Workshops."

in the same ritual. The uniqueness in this seal is that here the seated figure is subordinated to the group and not the primary focus of attention. The theme is conveyed visually by a dynamic association and not by a static tableau.

Iconographic similarities can also be cited. In some Urkesh seals we do see an emphasis on the head covering of the figures and here the hats are unusual and distinctive; more than likely they are part of a priestly dress style. In one seal of Tupkish a servant or official wears a head covering that has a strap going under the chin.¹⁷ A hat with a chin strap is also worn by a woman bent over performing an unknown task. She is significant because her bent figure carries, as it were, the horizontally placed inscription of the queen, Uqnitum.¹⁸ While both these examples from the seals of Tupkish and Uqnitum are worn by important figures in the scenes, it is not clear what their function is or the meaning of this head covering.

In this new seal the heads are large, the eyes and noses emphasized, the hand gestures clearly visible; all characteristics that are seen in the seals of Uqnitum and Tupkish. In many of their seals, too, there is an emphasis on the carved bevel of the border of the figures. This characteristic of the carving style is most noticeable at the point where the dress curves under the seated figure. In many cases the dress patterns are carved deeply to emphasize this bevel, thereby enhancing the feeling of the volume of the seated figure. In the ritual seal we see this as well in the dress of the seated figure. As shown in Fig. 7 the head of the sacrificed bull is depicted with one of the horns going behind the legs of the stool. This same overlapping of important elements in the scene used to indicate special relationships (in both cases animals and a seat) is found on one seal of Tupkish where the hindquarters and tail of the lion reclining at the foot of his throne overlap the base of his stool.¹⁹

The coherence of the formal expression in the new Urkesh seal reflects the precise rendering of the religious enactment through an iconography as unique as it is effective in communicating the religious setting. It is important to note that no deity is physically present but the divine manifestation is felt through charged symbols. While it is impossible to know what specific ritual is taking place here, the closeness of this seal to the iconographic style of the seals of Tupkish, the Hurrian king of Urkesh, suggests that this might very well reflect a Hurrian ritual enactment. In the later Hurrian-Hittite texts the usual offering to the weather-god was a sacrificed bull.²⁰ In the seal impressions from Kültepe, level 2, the bull cult is prominent as is the weather-god.²¹ One seal impression

¹⁷ G. Buccellati and M. Kelly-Buccellati, "The Seals of the King of Urkesh: Evidence from the Western Wing of the Royal Storehouse AK," *Festschrift für Hans Hirsch, Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 86 (1996) 65–102, especially Fig. 6.

¹⁸ G. Buccellati and M. Kelly-Buccellati 1998, "Workshops," 45–46.

¹⁹ G. Buccellati and M. Kelly-Buccellati 1995–96, Fig. 4a.

²⁰ Alberto Green, *The Storm God in the Ancient Near East* (Eisenbrauns 2003).

²¹ *Ibid.*, 99–113.

from Kültepe 2 depicts a storm-god threatening a reversed bull; he steps on the head of the bull while holding one of its rear legs with his right hand. In his left hand he holds a triangular-shaped knife strikingly similar in shape to the one used to slay the bull in the Urkesh seal.²² The same knife is also seen in an Akkadian seal of a god attacking a bull standing on a flat mountain or mountain-patterned altar with a bow and arrow.²³ Later in Hittite art the Inandiktepe relief vessel with a scene of a bull sacrificed before a statue of a bull is a promising parallel to our ritual scene. In that scene, too, there are two priests acting in the sacrifice of the bull.²⁴ Even though in the new Urkesh seal there is no clear iconographic indication that we are viewing a ritual connected with the weather-god, this interpretation is the most probable one.

The settings of the Hurrian myths, as preserved in later copies within the Hittite archives, reflect primarily a mountainous homeland. So it comes as no surprise that the connections of the material culture of Urkesh should lead us in that direction. Some of the closest parallels to the Urkesh seal iconography come from the Anatolian seals of Kültepe, level 2.²⁵ Reverberations of the Urkesh dynastic program have been demonstrated even as late as Neo-Hittite art.²⁶ In light of these iconographic similarities, it can be said that Urkesh is the earliest realization we have of an archaic Hurrian tradition, the cradle of which may be found in the mountainous north. Out of the myriad threads of a distant, and rural, Hurrian heritage, the urbanized Hurrians wove a new and original tradition, an art form that reflected their own world view. Urkesh was a meeting point for cultural traditions both northern and southern; its culture is Hurrian while, at the same time, being consonant with the traditions of the Mesopotamian south. This juxtaposition of Hurrian and Akkadian cultural traditions is what makes the culture of the city of Urkesh during the later part of the third millennium so intriguing and unique.

²² Nimet Özgüç, *The Anatolian Group of Cylinder Seal Impressions from Kültepe* (Ankara 1965) pl. iv, no.18.

²³ Henri Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals* (London 1939) pl. XXII:f.

²⁴ Tahsin Özgüç, *Inandiktepe: An Important Cult Center in the Old Hittite Period* (Ankara, 1988) especially pp. 83–106. See also the bull representations on the Kastamonu bowl in Kutlu Emre and Aykut Çınaroğlu, "A Group of Metal Hittite Vessels from Kinik-Kasamonu," in M. Mellink, E. Porada, and T. Özgüç *Aspects of Art and Iconography: Anatolia and Its Neighbors, Studies in Honor of Nimet Özgüç* (Ankara 1993) 675–713. I have greatly benefited from discussions of the iconography on this seal with Stefano DiMartino.

²⁵ This was the subject of several lectures I gave at the Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, UCLA, The University of Tübingen and Istituto di Studi Micenei ed Egeo-Anatolici, Rome.

²⁶ G. Buccellati and M. Kelly-Buccellati 1996, 77–80.